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ABSTRACT

Intended to help educators select textbooks that represent the highest standards of quality instruction, these guidelines describe major aspects of textbooks--of language arts instruction--considered essential. Following an introduction, the eight guidelines (whose features should be central to a program's design and should pervade the entire fabric of the textbook presentation), state that language arts instruction should: (1) center learning activities on children's own language; (2) emphasize social uses of language; (3) integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening; (4) recognize the developmental aspects of children's learning; (5) help teachers to assess student language learning; (6) help children to think; (7) respect cultural and other differences in our society; and (8) emphasize the centrality of listening, speaking, writing, and reading for learning in all subject areas. Each guideline is accompanied by a brief, clearly written explanation, a few references, and a number of examples of textbook features that are in accord with the selection criteria or that violate them. (An evaluation chart for judging language arts textbooks is attached.) (SR)

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Guidelines for Judging and Selecting Language Arts Textbooks: A Modest Proposal

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for the NCTE Committee on
Elementary Language Arts Textbooks

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GUIDELINES FOR JUDGING AND SELECTING LANGUAGE ARTS TEXTBOOKS

A Modest Proposal

"Textbooks, for better or worse, dominate what students learn" (Tyson-Bernstein, 1988, p. vii). It is estimated that textbooks structure 75 to 90 percent of classroom instruction (Woodward & Eliot, 1990). The English language arts textbook, no less than the math, reading, science or social studies textbook, is ubiquitous in American education. It is a familiar volume in the desks of many, perhaps most, students across the country. Some educators look to the text as the basic tool for language arts instruction, the organizer of most of the language arts curriculum. Many administrators rely on textbooks to provide a standardized curriculum in their school or district, and to overcome the woeful limitations of teacher education.

Other authorities deplore the presence of a text series in the classroom, charging that it prescribes the language curriculum, narrowing students' possibilities for language learning (Goodman, Freeman, Murphy, Shannon, 1987). Textbooks because of their often incorrect and incomplete information, and their vapid presentations, are often blamed as a "major contributor to the general fund of [student] ignorance" (Tyson & Woodward, 1989, p. 14). Textbook lessons have been denigrated for being artificial, and for weakening teacher authority and responsibility (Shannon, 1989).

It is not our task to try to resolve this, sometimes heated, conflict. We would like to note two important research findings, however. First, several studies have shown that textbooks are not necessary for student

achievement. Comparisons of textbooks with other, usually more teacher- or student-centered approaches, have generally found that there was no clear superiority for the textbook in terms of performance on standardized achievement tests. Students without textbooks were likely to do as well as those with them; or, textbooks were found to be superior in the various studies as often as they were found to be inferior.

Second, most students apparently can learn effectively from textbooks. Not only do textbooks do as well as other approaches in the already mentioned comparison studies, but most students are now being taught from textbooks as they have been for most of this century, and achievement levels are as high as they have ever been. Thus, textbooks can be effective, but they are not necessary. The guidelines provided here will not necessarily help someone to decide whether or not to use textbooks. But they can help teachers to select the most appropriate textbooks if they have already decided to use them, and they are useful instructional guidelines even for those who have decided not to.

Of course, whether or not textbooks continue to be used as widely as they have been, there is no place for poorly written, vaguely designed, inaccurate, pedagogically unsound, low quality texts in education. Publishers will produce engaging, memorable, worthwhile books only if "educators develop the capacity to recognize and purchase books that students will read eagerly, remember, and treasure" (Tyson & Woodward, 1989, p. 17). The guidelines recommended here are meant to help educators to select books that represent the highest standards of quality.

And while we have proposed these guidelines to help teachers to select the best textbooks, it should be remembered that we are not implying that

textbooks should necessarily be used. Our point is simply that if textbooks are going to be used, then they should be of the highest quality and the use of these guidelines can help to insure this. In fact, these guidelines might be as useful to those educators who have decided to work without textbooks as those in the selection process. The guidelines describe quality language arts instruction, not the qualities of textbooks, per se. Effective instruction, with or without textbooks, is what our children need.

Traditional textbook selection checklists often include dozens of features from bindings to content, from illustrations to pedagogy, and so on. It would be possible to consider literally hundreds of characteristics, though the average number seems to be about seventy (Comas, 1982; cited in Tyson-Bernstein, 1988). No wonder that teachers confronted with such a task end up selecting materials that don't actually satisfy either students' needs or their own instructional requirements.

Consequently, we have proposed only nine guidelines. Each of these, however, is of considerable import to student learning or represents common values of our diverse profession. These guidelines emphasize those major aspects of textbooks-- of language arts instruction-- that we consider to be essential.

These guidelines cannot be used in a simplistic fashion. Because of their over-arching importance, these features must be central to a program's design. They should pervade the entire fabric of the textbook presentation. For example, we indicate that social uses of literacy and language should be stressed. To satisfy this precept it is not enough to stick a social use of two at the end of a traditional grammar lesson. To be carried out effectively, this guideline necessarily requires a whole range of considerations about

authenticity, students' relations with others, the nature of instructional activities, teacher explanations, outcome goals and the like. Teachers must examine a text thoroughly in order to know whether it satisfies this criterion. The same can be said for each of the proposed guidelines.

To assist teachers and administrators in this process each guideline is accompanied by a brief, clearly written explanation of some of the considerations entailed in that criterion. These are not meant to be exhaustive. Instead, they were written to illustrate some of the more central concerns relevant to a particular guideline. (Sometimes these explanations overlap a bit. This should not be surprising given the centrality and breadth of each guideline, however).

Along with each explanation we have cited a few references. Textbook selection and instructional design require a wealth of knowledge. We strongly encourage educators that are involved in decisions about textbooks to seek out and study some of these, and other, sources. These helped us to formulate the guidelines, and we believe that they will help others to use them effectively.

The presentations of each guideline include a number of examples of textbook features that we thought to be in accord with the criteria, and some, alas, that were clear violations of them. Some of these negative examples represent clear violations. Others are breaches more of the spirit than of the words. An aspect of a text design might be cited negatively because, though in <u>apparent</u> agreement with a guideline, it accomplishes the criterion only superficially. Again, it is important that these features be a central property of the text. Educators have to be especially careful of those text components that are labeled in ways that suggest they are in accord with how

children learn. High quality labels do not insure high quality lessons! The examples, positive and negative, are not thorough. They simply show how the guidelines might be interpreted.

Even with the guidelines a good deal of professional intelligence in using textbooks seems necessary. Many language arts textbooks are so extensive in the activities that they recommend that it would be difficult to do accomplish them all and still teach well. Textbook publishers often try to provide everything you could possibly use, but it would be a mistake to use everything. Teachers must use a professional wisdom when selecting materials, and they must continue to use this wisdom each day as they try to provide the most powerful instruction for their students.

Certainly, the first decision, prior to textbook selection, is to determine whether textbooks will be selected at all. If the decision is to use texts, then we believe that teachers can use these guidelines to help them to select the very best quality books. These guidelines cannot be used effectively as a simple checklist in which teachers choose the books that accumulate the most checks. They need to be used carefully, reflectively, and deliberatively as a guide to <u>teacher judgments</u>.

Finally, a textbook, no matter how well written, cannot assure high quality instruction or learning. The text is a tool, the use of which is necessarily governed by teacher and student judgment and intelligence. Teachers, after selection, must continue to engage in the same careful, reflective thinking process already described in order to assure that they offer the finest language arts instruction on a daily basis to their students. We hope the guidelines will help teachers to engage more effectively in this on-going thinking process.

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Woodward, A., & Elliot, D. L. (1990). Textbook use and teacher profes sionalism. In D. L. Elliot & A. Woodward (Eds.), Textbooks and schooling in the United States (89th Yearbook, Part 1, of the National Society for the Study of Education). Chicago: NSSE.

I. **Language arts instruction should center learning activities on children's own language.**

How do children learn language? Obviously, language learning is a complex process, but authorities agree that active involvement in the use of language is an essential component of success. Most simply stated, language is learned through use: reading is learned through reading, writing through writing, and so on. Language arts textbooks should encourage the use of language by children.

Language learning requires a knowledge of language sounds, discourse organization, sentence construction, vocabulary knowledge, and an awareness of the communicative needs of others, and much more. However, this knowledge is necessarily implicit; language users proceed as if they knew these things, though they might be unaware of this knowledge. Such understandings, because of their implicit nature, are more likely to be developed through active use than through explicit teaching of information. Related to this idea is the notion that all of these language systems or types of knowledge develop simultaneously.

Of course, when problems occur or circumstances require, mature language users can exercise conscious control of their own linguistic choices, such as when a writer attempts to select "just the right word." Again,

however, conscious control is more likely to be developed through activities that encourage self awareness and control of one's own language, than it would be through more constrained and external instructional exercises.

Although language requires a good deal of knowledge, it is a skilled activity more than a collection of information. Language use and learning requires the orchestration of the various types of knowledge into a coherent and meaningful whole. Involvement in genuine language activities offers the clearest opportunity for helping children to coordinate the different aspects of language in meaningful and productive ways.

It is not enough that lessons encourage involvement in language use either. The entire emphasis should be on children's language, communicative purposes, thinking strategies, self awareness and motives. The information presented and the activities used should include clear demonstrations of their significance to the students' own language efforts. Textbooks should encourage children to formulate their own purposes and not assign them; they should inform students about skills in the context of their own reading, writing, speaking and listening; they should encourage children to think about their own language rather than about artificial textbook-supplied samples or exercises.

Sources

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Lindfors, J. W. (1987). Children's language and learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 1

Encouraging or expecting children to keep a daily log or journal.

Having children conduct interviews with persons in the community.

Doing spelling and vocabulary activities with words from their own writing.

Having children set purposes for reading a story or article.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 1

Revising a piece of writing presented in the language arts book. (It is one thing to give a critical response to a genuine story, it is another thing to pretend that you yourself have written something when it was really designed just to show mistakes for you to correct).

Having children going through a story with the purpose of adding "-er" and "-est" to all of the adjectives. (This isn't really how someone makes such decisions in language use).

Lesson plans that encourage devoting one or two days to reading a story or article and the rest of the week to completing workbook exercises.

VI. **Language arts instruction should emphasize social uses of language.**

We attempt to satisfy various needs and to accomplish a plethora of tasks in our daily lives. We consequently use language in a purposeful way towards the fulfillment of these needs and the realization of our desires. Appropriate instruction will provide children with opportunities to use their language towards the accomplishment of genuine goals. Such opportunities show how language might be used, offer experiences in making effective linguistic decisions, highlight the meaningfulness of language, and motivate children to develop a broad repertoire of language skills.

Scholars have attempted to describe many of the purposes of written and oral language. And, though these descriptions often differ and overlap, they do serve to illustrate the range of ways that we use our language. We use language to get what we want, to control behavior, to participate in social relationships, to establish identity or individuality, to learn, to imagine, to inform, to entertain, to think critically, to fulfill ourselves aesthetically, to discover, to evaluate, to clarify, to reinforce our beliefs, and so on. Language arts instruction should help children to participate in such activities through their reading, writing, speaking and listening.

A central point here is that the purposes towards which we use our language have important implications for how we use our language. The functions toward which we use language and literacy shape the ways in which we use them. What types of reading materials are needed to accomplish a particular goal? How carefully should something be written? Why are we listening to a speech? What will our relationship be with our audience? To which parts of the message should we direct our attention? Such questions reveal some of the ways in which our purposes shape our uses of language. Sound language instruction will engage children in language use through a wide range of genuine purposeful activities.

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Wells, C. G. (1986). The meaning makers: Children learning language and using language to learn. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 2

Having children write a letter to someone and actually sending it.

Cooking something or completing a craft activity by following a recipe.

Revision checklists and guidelines that emphasize meaningful communication over simple editing for errors.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 2

Workbook exercises in which children provide short answers or fill in the blanks. (The point of these is usually to provide children with practice in a skill.

Genuine reading, writing, speaking and listening provide such practice also and these should predominate.)

Skills instruction that does not have a clear tie to actual use. (Skills instruction might precede use, or it might be provided in response to

use, but it definitely should be linked with use explicitly).

Pretend exercises. ("Let's pretend to write a letter." Such activities often change the way the language arts are used because they violate the social realities; in this case, since there is no real audience many of the requirements of thinking during writing are removed).

III. **Language arts instruction should integrate reading writing, speaking and listening.**

Reading, writing, speaking and listening are not separate subject matters. They are, instead, a set of interdependent ways of using language. All of them rely on the ability to create and interpret signs and symbols in meaningful ways. All of them are reliant on a common base of knowledge and process. Combined instruction has often been found to lead to higher achievement. Despite this, language books have more commonly emphasized particular aspects of language learning while ignoring others.

Because the language arts rely on a common core of linguistic and psycholinguistic knowledge, their combined instruction can increase the efficiency of language learning. And, because, reading and writing, speaking and listening make up two sides of a communications process, their combination in the classroom increases the possibility of children being involved in and learning from genuine communication. Finally, the language arts can be combined toward the accomplishment of various goals. Rarely is it sufficient to talk without listening or to write without reading, and other combinations can be effective too. A sound language arts program will help children to understand how they can use the lan-

guage arts in combination effectively.

Of course, it is not enough that more than one aspect of the language arts be included in the program. A sound language arts program will be carefully designed to emphasize and exploit the overlaps in knowledge and process that exist among the components of language. It will also emphasize communications by showing speakers and writers how to think about their audiences, and it will help readers and listeners to think critically about the purposes and sources of information. Language arts textbooks should show students how they can use their total language more effectively.

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Shanahan, T. (Ed.). (1990). Reading and writing together: New perspectives in the classroom. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 3

Having children write responses to quality literature that they have read or listened to.

Having children share their writing so that they can learn from the responses of their audience.

Helping children to read their own writing so that they can improve it its effectiveness.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 3

The emphasis on grammar, with little or no relationship to authentic composition, oral language, or reading activity.

The lack of literature in language arts instruction.

The omission of information on how students might use different forms of language together, and the absence of activities in which they are encouraged to do so.

IV. **Language arts instruction should recognize the developmental aspects of children's learning.**

Children change over time. They change in what they know, and they change in what seems possible for them to learn and understand. In many subject matters it is possible to array the content of learning so that more complex information is preceded by simpler information. The processes of reading, writing, speaking and listening cannot be as easily or accurately divided up into types and sequences of information, however. The types of changes that occur in language learning and use are not this specific. Issues of participation and fluency tend to be more important early on, and those of conscious control appear to gain importance with development.

Nevertheless, language processes are more alike than different across developmental levels. Younger children might not yet be able to approximate adult uses of language as closely as older students do, but they rely on the same features and processes of language. Children do not accumulate language processes as much as they refine them over time.

Language becomes more sophisticated through the creation and use of more mature and complex samples of language in more involved communicative settings. It

does not become more sophisticated simply by adding additional categories of information. Language arts textbooks need to reflect this through activities that emphasize relatively complete literacy and language acts from the very beginning, with the necessary instructional support to assure that children are successfully learning through their attempts to use language.

That children should participate in relatively complete meaningful language acts does not mean that they will perform these like adults. It is to be expected that they will do so imperfectly. Errors are not only prevalent, they are a necessary part of the learning process. Textbooks should encourage children to participate so that productive errors can occur. They should provide teachers with information about the types of variations that children are likely to display at various developmental levels, and they should offer advice about productive responses to these variations.

Sources

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Teale, W., & Sulzby, E. (1986). Emergent literacy. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Wells, G. (1986). The meaning makers. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 4

Activities that involve children in complete acts of listening, speaking, reading, and writing at all grade levels. (Students are involved in planning, using, and revising their reading, writing, speaking and listening actions).

Advice to the teacher on how to respond to characteristic student errors.

Activities sequences that proceed from actual use to refinement-through-instruction. (In other words, instruction should be provided relative to student's current language use).

Modeling how students might carry out a task (such as emphasizing pre-writing experiences, showing how they might draw as a basis for writing or dictating a story in first grade).

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 4

No examples of characteristic student work in the teacher's guides.

Emphasis on skills without any clear connection to actual language use. (The descriptive adjectives activity in which children copy adjectives into sentence blanks, is an example. If it is important to know about adjectives, then children should be shown how to use these effectively in their own reading and writing).

Competitive activities. (Generally, competitive activities have a negative correlation with learning in the elementary grades. This shows a lack of consideration of student levels).

V. **Language arts instruction should help teachers to assess student language learning.**

Effective teachers are decision makers. They observe children's experiences, they evaluate student performances, and they seek information about how effectively students are learning. Good teachers monitor children's learning so that they can adjust instruction in ways that will enhance and facilitate learning.

Textbooks should help teachers in the collection of evidence of children's growth. In the past, textbooks have scrupulously included formal tests of children's reading, writing, and sometimes even speaking and listening. Although formal tests have their place in schools, language instruction is more likely to be facilitated by less formal instruments and techniques that help teachers to observe student performances in an ongoing manner. Questioning and discussion, interviews, portfolios, and the like can be more useful sources of information than formal pencil-and-paper tests. Authentic assessments gain validity from being drawn directly from the activities in which children are engaged in instructionally. They have reliability because of their ongoing nature; unlike tests, these do not usually provide information from a single performance. They also have the benefit of not taking time away from learning.

Textbooks should help teachers in the evaluation of the information that is collected, also. It is relatively easy to recommend that teachers collect student writing in a folder, or that they should inventory student reading. It is more difficult, of course, to make sense of such information. Textbooks, preferably through genuine examples of student work, can encourage teachers to think systematically about their students' performances. The types of judgments encouraged should be carefully designed to help teachers to provide instruction, and to offer information to children and parents, more effectively.

The assessment procedures that are recommended should include a role for children, too. Greater learning is likely to accrue in those situations in which children have a clear conception of the quality of their own performances. The assessment procedures and devices should involve children in thinking about their own learning.

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Jaggar, A., & Smith-Burke, M. T. (1985). Observing the language learner. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Tierney, R. J., Carter, M. A., & Desai, L. E. (1991). Portfolio assessment in the reading-writing class room. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 5

Instruments that help a teacher evaluate children's speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities-- and instruments for children to use.

Advice on how to observe children's language in use, such as a note-taking system for teachers.

Advice for teachers on how to respond to a great diversity of student work (such as: for some children at this level writing a single sentence will be a major accomplishment; grading at this level might be discouraging; it would be better to emphasize effort and fluency at this level rather than accuracy, etc.).

Portfolio plan with directions to the teacher on how the various exemplars of children's work might be evaluated.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 5

No evaluation material included.

Inclusion of "tests" only. (With little or no regard for other ways of finding out about student performance).

No examples of student work.

Evaluation criterion that are not helpful (such as having the teacher evaluate word order in student written questions: native English language children will not commonly make errors in word order).

VI. **Language arts instruction should help children to think.**

A fundamental goal of education is "to develop mature thinkers who are able to acquire and use knowledge" (Marzano, et al., 1988, p. 2). In order to solve problems, communicate effectively, and participate in a democratic society, children must learn to think creatively and critically.

Admittedly, thinking can proceed without language. However, language activities offer an ideal opportunity for practicing and developing thought. Language has the ability to make thinking explicit which helps children to become aware of their own thought processes. Such awareness is necessary to develop control over one's thinking. Language can have an instrumental role in many aspects of cognition: drawing on background knowledge, consolidating new information, reformulating understandings, reasoning, and critical analysis.

Historically, it was believed that the receptive acts of language (listening and reading) could contribute to thinking, but that the productive acts (spe king and writing) could only exhibit or display thinking. Advances in cognitive psychology have shown that this is not true, however. While reading and listening are important sources of information, so are writing and

speaking. Participation in both interpretive and composing activities (written and oral) contribute to the development of thinking.

One way that language arts textbooks can facilitate the development of thinking is by encouraging problem-solving activities. Goal directed action requires the identification and analysis of a problem, the synthesis of various information, the generation of possible solutions, the evaluation of these possible approaches, and taking a course of action. When children are engaged in problem-solving they must use all types of reasoning to be successful, and all types of language as well.

Children should be encouraged to engage in more creative activities, too. Speaking and writing are especially useful in more free flowing, expressive, and generative activities. Children should be encouraged to invent, create, and to push beyond the limits of their present knowledge. Finally, children should be encouraged to critically analyze the ideas of others. Literature, both fact and fiction, offers an ideal opportunity for analysis of ideas and the exercise of evaluative judgment.

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Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 6

Research projects that engage students in all aspects of inquiry.

Activities in which students, on the basis of reading, make and substantiate judgments about a story or some element of a story (character, etc.).

Pre-writing lessons in which children learn how and why brainstorming can be helpful.

Use of cooperative learning groups in which different children take responsibilities for figuring out different parts of a problem.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 6

Children cut out and attach windows and doors over workbook pictures in a lesson on singular and plural nouns. (This is activity without thought and it has little to do with its objective either).

Pre-writing activities in which children are asked questions so that they know what to write about. (The problem here is that it is not explained to children why this questioning is a good idea, nor are they shown how to self-question).

VII. **Language arts instruction should respect cultural and other differences in our society.**

Language is an essential part of who we are culturally. Different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial and gender groups use language in different ways. These differences represent part of the almost endless variation of language that is so fascinating. These differences, however, also have the potential of leading to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and stereotyping. In a pluralistic society, it is important that we recognize the special qualities of our own language use while becoming aware of the value and importance of the language behaviors of others.

The study of language should include the consideration of a great variety of literature. Literature, because it can be drawn from so many cultures, has the ability to affirm the value of one's own cultural heritage. It also allows the positive and fair representation of all people, in their own words. Literature can provide an honest portrayal of the human condition-- especially of those traits common to all. And literature can increase our understanding and appreciation of the contributions of others. High quality literature can help us to challenge our parochialism and prejudice.

Literature alone is not enough, however. The

study of language should consider the cultural differences among people in how they communicate. Groups use language, along with non-verbal aspects of communication, in different ways for different purposes. A critically important characteristic of language sophistication is the ability to recognize the meanings of these differences. Language arts instruction should help to enhance interpersonal communication and to minimize misunderstandings among peoples.

Unfortunately, language differences are often misinterpreted as being indicative of intellectual or cultural deprivation. Children who use non-standard English are too often labeled as being deficient because of the nature of their language. Language arts textbooks need to provide clear and sensitive explanations of the differences that exist. While all groups should have standard English available to them, as this has social power in our society, this understanding should never be accomplished at the expense of the children's appreciation of their own language or of the linguistic accomplishments from their own cultural heritage.

Sources

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Weber, R. M. (1990). Linguistic diversity and reading in American society. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), Handbook of reading research, (vol. II). New York: Longman.

Wertsch, J. V. (1985). Culture, communication, and cognition. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 7

Inclusion of exemplary literature from a wide range of world cultures.

Emphasis on cultural contributions of all groups in literature and discussions.

Instruction in dialect and body language differences in the context of communication (such as explaining what it means to avert one's eyes in various cultures).

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 7

Usage lessons that make no adjustments on the basis of student's dialect differences.

Neglect of cultural differences altogether.

Use of literature that negatively portrays characters in such a way that students may infer that the character's weaknesses are due to culture, gender, or ethnic background.

VIII. **Language arts instruction should emphasize the centrality of listening, speaking, writing, and reading for learning in all subject areas.**

A basic purpose of schooling is to help children to develop a common body of knowledge in a variety of subject matters. Children are instructed in mathematics, history, social studies, science, health and many other subject areas. One of the most essential purposes of language is the ability to use language to learn. Although a range of purposes and uses need to be stressed in a language arts program, the use of language towards learning is one that deserves special attention.

Language is one of the most powerful tools for gathering, studying, and using information. The all-too-typical separation of the language arts from subject matter specializations is peculiar and potentially damaging. The content of each discipline is different, and each has its own language and ways of using language, both oral and written. Children need to become aware of the linguistic choices reflected and expressed by different genre and ways of knowing in the various disciplines.

Language arts programs should include challenging and appropriate content from the various subject mat-

ters. The inclusion of such material provides students with opportunities to use their developing language abilities in ways that would facilitate learning. It would encourage and support teacher efforts to teach children learning strategies: how to preview, consider prior knowledge, organize information, remember information, reflect upon it effectively, work cooperatively with others towards these ends and so on.

The emphasis on using language to learn rather than on learning language offers ideal opportunities for thematic treatments of content. Such integrative approaches help children to understand the special qualities of the language of different disciplines. Sound language arts instruction will actively engage children in using language to learn in a variety of situations, and it will help them to develop intentional strategies for learning.

Sources

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Pappas, C. C., Kiefer, B., & Levstik, L. (1990). An integrated language perspective in the elementary school. New York: Longman.

Vosniadou, S., & Brewer, W. F. (1987). Theories of knowledge restructuring in development. Review of Educational Research, 57, 51-67.

Some Text Features or Activities Consistent with Guideline 8

Examples of language use or literature drawn from a wide variety of subject areas.

Use of thematic units that emphasize the value of several subject matters simultaneously while showing the role of language in understanding these subjects.

Cooperative learning projects that require students to use information from mathematics, history, social studies, the arts, and so on.

Teaching children systematic ways to use reading, writing and discussion in studying.

Some Text Features or Activities That Violate Guideline 8

Use of literature that is all fiction and poetry, without representations of other genre or ways of knowing.

Use of material from other subject matters in superficial ways (such as having students search for verb markers in a history passage; the history passage is being used only as a language sample, and not as a history passage).

Over emphasis on language arts as a content subject complete with a body of information to be learned (including terminology such as "gerund" or "preposition," and grammatical or other linguistic rules), with equal or less regard to the use of language within the learning process.

Revised
Form
4/91

Lester Knight
University of Tennessee

Tool for Judging Language Arts Testbooks

Textbook Grade level

	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
I. Primacy of the Children's Own Language A. Lesson ideas help teachers keep the language focus on students and purposes for communication.					
B. Text supplements and enriches students' active use of language in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.					
II. Focus on the Social Uses of Language A. Students are encouraged to value their own speaking and writing efforts and to work toward clear and appropriate communication.					
B. Students are encouraged to participate in genuine, rather than contrived, language activities.					
C. Students may be expected to learn the significance of language competence for family, occupations, citizenship, and leisure time.					

	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
III. Integrated Nature of Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading A. An integrated performance rather than mastery of discrete skills is emphasized.					
B. A limited set of goals is apparent which undergirds a wholistic approach.					
C. Emphasis is placed on how the receptive and expressive skills can be used together to accomplish desired goals.					
D. The use of children's literature is an integral part of the activities.					
IV. Breadth of Developmental Language Arts Patterns A. Goals reflect continuity throughout the program.					
B. Individual variation in mastery of goals on the continuum are clearly recognized.					
V. Assessment of Students' Use of Language A. Assessment procedures help describe accomplishment level of each goal.					

	Always	Usually	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
B. Assistance is provided for interpreting observation of students' daily use of language for a variety of purposes.					
C. Assistance is provided for the students as they judge their own language understanding and use.					
VI. Stimulation of Thinking A. Assistance is provided for developing a variety of mechanisms to maximize inquiry and reflection.					
B. The purposes, origins, and dynamic nature of language itself emanate from the experiences and activities provided.					
VII. Equity Balance A. Students can become increasingly aware of the cultural influences upon their own language and the language of others.					
B. Dialect and body language are dealt within the context of communication.					

	Always	Usually	Occasion-ally	Seldom	Never
C. Emphasis is placed on valuing the cultural contributions of all groups in a pluralistic society.					
D. Literature used is drawn from a wide range of world cultures.					
VIII. Centrality of Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Reading for Learning A. Learning opportunities are drawn from a variety of subject areas.					
B. Language is viewed as foundational for all learning.					